

The Theory of Reflexive Modernization

Problematic, Hypotheses and Research Programme

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The Modernization of Modern Society

THE 'REFLEXIVITY' in 'reflexive modernization' is often misunderstood. It is not simply a redundant way of emphasizing the self-referential quality that is a constitutive part of modernity. Instead, what 'reflexive modernization' refers to is a distinct second phase: *the modernization of modern society*. When modernization reaches a certain stage it radicalizes itself. It begins to transform, for a second time, not only the key institutions but also the very principles of society. But this time the principles and institutions being transformed are those of modern society.

So the social structures of the post-war order should not be absolutized as if they were the end of social history. On the contrary, much of what they once presumed as necessary now looks contingent. The dominant 'container' model of society, which (often tacitly, and the more tenaciously for that) identifies society with the nation-state, presumes a large number of interlocking social institutions. Among them are: a reliable welfare state; mass parties anchored in class culture; and a stable nuclear family consisting of a single breadwinner, his housewife and their children. These institutions are supported by, and in turn support, a web of economic security woven out of industrial regulation, full employment and life-long careers. And the entire arrangement is rendered intelligible to its members by a

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clarity of thought based on several clear distinctions: between society and nature; between established knowledge and mere belief; and between the members of society and outsiders.

Reflexive modernization throws all of these basic social principles into flux. In first modern, or simple modern society, social change is conceived of as occurring within a stable system of coordinates. But the challenge of theorizing reflexive modernization is that the system of coordinates is changing. If the fundamental distinctions and criteria that we have always identified with modern society no longer apply, where can one begin? What can 'modern society' mean if *not* the nation-state? What can modernization mean under such conditions? How can one make reasonable decisions about the future under conditions of such uncertainty? And how can reflexive social institutions develop and grow in a world that is, in some respects, literally boundless? Framed thus, the theory of reflexive modernization has to be worked out theoretically and tested empirically.¹

There are similarities between our approach and that of postcolonial writers, some of whom have criticized modernity as a kind of Western patent medicine that (falsely) promises to cure all ills. We have also learned from those who have critiqued modernity from a human rights perspective, from an ecological perspective and from the perspective of the 'pluralization of modernities' that has been observed in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe.² But a detailed contrasting of those positions with our own must also await later publications.

At stake in this – and the defining thematic – is a decidedly non-linear notion of change and modernity. The hypothesis of a 'reflexive' modernization of modern societies examines a fundamental societal transformation within modernity. Modernity has not vanished, but it is becoming increasingly problematic. While crises, transformation and radical social change have always been part of modernity, the transition to a reflexive second modernity not only changes social structures but revolutionizes the very coordinates, categories and conceptions of change itself.

This '*meta-change*' of modern society results from a critical mass of unintended side-effects. By unintended side-effects – or more precisely, effects that were originally intended to be more narrow in their scope than they turned out to be – we mean the host of consequences resulting from the boundary-shattering force of market expansion, legal universalism and technical revolution – in short, the process that Marx once celebrated as that by which 'everything solid melts into air'. The continued technical, economic, political and cultural development of global capitalism has gradually revolutionized its own social foundations. In the transformation from a *first modernity* that was largely synonymous with the nation-state to a *second modernity*, the shape of which is still being negotiated, modernization ends up stripping away the nation- and welfare state, which at one time supported it but later restrained it. In so doing, modernization is calling into question its own basic premises.

Reflexive modernization seems to be producing a new kind of

capitalism, a new kind of labour, a new kind of global order, a new kind of society, a new kind of nature, a new kind of subjectivity, a new kind of everyday life and a new kind of state. It is now the central task of social science to investigate this meta-change, which is happening not within social structures but to them. Empirical investigation and conceptual hard work are needed in order to produce a reasonable picture of this new world that people and institutions can use to orient themselves.

What is the difference between reflexive modernity and postmodernity? Despite the fact that there are many meanings to the word 'postmodernity', and many of them overlap with the concept of reflexive modernity, there is still a clear difference between the two. The theory of re-modernization³ maintains that there are new rules of the game for our political and social systems, and the task of social science is to grasp them, describe them, understand them and explain them. So, whereas for many theorists of postmodernism the issue is one of the *de*-structuration of society and the *de*-conceptualization of social science, for re-modernization it is a matter of *re*-structuration and *re*-conceptualization. The goal is to decipher the new rules of the social game even as they are coming into existence. The old certainties, distinctions and dichotomies are fading away, but through close investigation of that process we can discover what is taking their place. This approach couldn't be more foreign to the 'farewell to science' view found in some quarters of postmodernism. Rather it is a call for the strengthening of social science. Social science can no longer aspire to take a god's-eye point of view and the control that goes with it, but it can find another way to know.

The following sections will examine different key aspects of re-modernization:

- the distinction between first and second modern society;
- the discontinuity at the heart of the modern: the hypothesis of an historical break;
- forms of meta-change and concrete examples;
- empirical and analytic criteria for testing the theory of reflexive modernization.

The Distinction between First and Second Modern Society

So what is the central meaning of the word 'reflexive' in 'reflexive modernization'?⁴ 'Reflexive' does *not* mean that people today lead a more conscious life. On the contrary. 'Reflexive' signifies not an 'increase of mastery and consciousness, but a heightened awareness that mastery is impossible' (Latour, 2003). Simple modernization becomes reflexive modernization to the extent that it disenchant and then dissolves its own taken-for-granted premises. Eventually this leads to the undermining of every aspect of the nation-state: the welfare state; the power of the legal system; the national economy; the corporatist systems that connected one with the other; and the parliamentary democracy that governed the whole. A parallel process

undermines the social institutions that buttressed this state and were supported by it in turn. The normal family, the normal career and the normal life history are all suddenly called into question and have to be re-negotiated.

The Premises of First Modern Society

By the premises of first modern society, we mean the foundations of its self-description: the explicit or implicit assumptions expressed in the actions and self-understanding of citizens, the goals of politics and the routines of social institutions. One can certainly argue which premises hold in particular cases, but preliminarily and on the grounds of conceptual economy, we will limit ourselves here to six important points. The first three focus on the structural and systemic presuppositions of modern society, and the last three on the self-description of social action.

1. First modern societies are *nation-state* societies defined by territorial boundaries. Modern social relations are conceived as 'contained' in a national territory and most institutions boast an integrated relation to the nation-state.
2. First modern societies distinguish themselves by a programmatic *individualization*. But this is crucially *bounded* on several sides by patterns of collective life that are heavily reminiscent of pre-modern structures that determined one's status by birth. Individuals in this society are theoretically free and equal and their associations are voluntary. But their freedom and equality are moulded by social institutions – for example, the sexual division of labour – that are in many respects coercive.
3. First modern societies are *work societies* or more precisely, *gainful employment societies*; in their fully developed form, they are what was once called in Europe 'full employment societies' – that is, societies in which unemployment is so low that it can justifiably be considered frictional. Status, consumption and social security all flow from participation in the economy, according to a model first propounded in the 18th century and finally realized in the 20th. Conversely this means that the opportunity to obtain gainful employment must be conceded to every member of society (although in light of the sexual division of labour, this concretely means every male member of society).
4. First modern societies have a particular *concept of nature* founded on its *exploitation*. Nature is simultaneously central to society and marginalized. It appears as the 'outside' of society. Nature is conceived of as a neutral resource, which can and must be made available without limitation. This is the prerequisite of an industrial dynamic of affluence which regards its normal state as one of endless growth, and which succeeds in displacing its negative effects so that they seem to originate elsewhere.
5. First modern societies unfold themselves on the basis of a scientifically defined concept of rationality that emphasizes instrumental control. Rational progress is conceived of as a process of demystification that can

continue without limits. This implies a belief that *scientization* can eventually perfect the control of nature.

6. First modern societies understand and manage their development according to the *principle of functional differentiation*. A division of society into social subsystems and various patterns of social action makes development appear synonymous with the growth of complexity. The continuous differentiation of societal functions through progressive specialization is assumed to lead to a better and better calibration of ends with means.

This summary of the premises of first modern society is neither systematic nor complete, and a more extensive and exact formulation remains to be elaborated. But it should be possible, on this preliminary basis, to formulate some theses about how the changing structure of society is affecting them. These premises were generated as first modern society developed very gradually and laboriously. But the same process of modernization that made them first possible and then necessary, has finally rendered them obsolete.

Let us deal with the initial part of that process first. These premises were gradually integrated as tacit assumptions underlying first modern society through a process of naturalization and anthropologization. Such a naturalization was a prerequisite for developing the following social structures:

- the nation-state – first seen as an achievement and later as a limitation – upon whose territorial framework every social institution of first modern society is based. This in turn entailed
- the territorial organization of production, corporations and regulation as the stage upon which the opposition of capital and labour was first witnessed, before their re-appearing as reconcilable;
- the sexual division of labour, often referred to as a ‘fact of nature’, as the basis of a highly unequal organization of paid labour. This phenomenon can be seen as underlying
- the nuclear family, as condition, reproduction and guarantee of the predominantly male labour power commodity;
- the relatively closed-off social milieus and life-worlds of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, upon which basis class cultures could develop into intermediary social identities;
- the differentiation and separation of social subsystems (economy, politics, technical management, culture, science) which were eventually experienced as separate, distinct and hierarchical;
- the restructuring of social knowledge, altering its hierarchy, so that experiential and occupational knowledge was devalued and theoretical and supervisory knowledge was increased in status. This typically flowed from the instrumental concept of nature and the identification of rationality with control. Related to it was
- the creation of a hierarchy between experts and laymen which was grounded on the monopoly of knowledge by professionals.

These developments are naturalized in the self-description of first modern society in two senses. On the one hand, it is argued that they rest on natural distinctions. And on the other (and this is also a form of naturalization), these social distinctions appear as if they were largely unalterable. It is conceded by modern society's defenders that there are shortcomings and difficulties. But these problems are considered contingent, and do not seriously undermine the first modern faith – that continuing along this line of development is the only way forward: towards increasing differentiation, growing complexity and an expanding control over nature.

The Challenges and Dynamics of Second Modernity

First modern society regards itself as the end and culmination of history, as a social form that will last forever. The likelihood of this is severely put in question by the following processes:

1. Globalization undermines the economic foundations of first modern society, and with it the idea of society as nation-state. This is because structural changes that are often referred to in shorthand as the 'vanishing of borders' have effects far beyond their immediate impact on the economy. Globalization also has political and cultural dimensions which, by changing the relation between the local and the global and between domestic and foreign, affect the very meaning of national borders, and, with that, all the certainties upon which nation-state society is based.
2. From the 1960s onwards, the welfare state (and its half-private, half-public analogues in the USA, in health care, housing and education) has provided the basis for an intensification of *individualization* (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001). The result has been the erosion of several ascriptive patterns of collective life, each of which has gradually lost its legitimacy. The universalization of freedom and equality represents a further development of key modern social principles. But it is creating hitherto unknown social forms, while undermining several familiar ones that once were at the institutional heart of first modern society.
3. An important aspect of this expansion of individualization has been the transformation of gender roles: research showed that categories like men and women were not copies of a more originary heterosexuality, but they showed how the so-called originals, men and women within the heterosexual frame, are constructed, performatively established (Butler, 1990). Thus, changing the internal relations of families, producing *The Normal Chaos of Love* (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995) and dissolving the sexual division of labour, affects the labour market from two directions:
4. The flexible employment practices that appeared in the wake of the 'third industrial revolution', express, in their chronic form, a breakdown in the full employment society, and perhaps even in the central significance of gainful employment. In the last two decades, in *The Brave New World of Work* (Beck, 2000a), status, consumption and social security choices have

– to some extent – become progressively independent of income, and thus of labour force participation.

5. Last, we must add the political dynamic that is being set in motion by the perception of a global ecological crisis, which includes the acknowledgement of limited resources. These consequences of the instrumental relation to nature are making it more and more difficult to continue conceiving of nature as a neutral and infinite provider of resources. Nature is no longer solely perceived as an outside that can be adapted to one's purposes, but increasingly as part and parcel of society.

How these developments are expressed and the potential they have for altering the course of modernization can only be made clear through empirical research. But the outline sketched above of a 'revolution of side-effects' shows why terms like 'ambivalence', 'ambiguity', 'perplexity' and 'contradiction' occur so often in the literature. Where indeed does one begin to define the situation? Who could be the possible 'subject' of feasible reforms? The institutionalized answers of first modern society to its self-produced problems – for example, more and better technology, more economic growth, more scientific research and more specialization – are less persuasive than they once were, although it is not at all clear what should take their place.

This particular distinction between first and second modern society also has the virtue of setting clear boundaries for theoretical inquiry. Since this theory posits first modern society as a prerequisite for second modern society, there are groups of countries it doesn't apply to, for example, parts of Africa or Asia. According to the criteria laid out above, these areas never experienced a first modern society, despite the fact that they are now enduring several of the same destabilizing forces as regions that did.

In other words, the distinction laid out above only applies to *one* historical constellation. It is completely *Eurocentric*. It takes for granted that the institutions that second modern society dissolves or transforms are there in the first place: a nation-state, a welfare state (a rudimentary one at least), highly developed institutions of science and technology, and the institutionalized expectation of full employment. Naturally this European constellation must be enlarged and reassessed by studying the effects of second modernity on non-European constellations, where the dynamic of reflexive modernization displays its effects not on first modern societies but rather on the distorted constellations of postcolonialism. *Different non-European routes to and through second modernity* still have to be described, discovered, compared and analysed.

Against a background of early intercultural exchange, Europe invented modernity. Therefore it has a special responsibility to 'de-invent' it, that is, to contribute to a reshaping of modernity at the global level. Thus the theory of reflexive modernization has important normative and political implications. In publications to come we have to find answers to the problems of both how to conceptualize the possibility of 'other modernities'

and how to arrange institutions of transnational, transreligious dialogue for its supply. What resources must we have in order to transform the exclusive nation-state organized societies into inclusive cosmopolitical societies and states, which bring into the human communities the cultural Others of first European modernity? That is the task of a radical cosmopolitical democratic theory and practice (Archibugi, 1995; Held, 1995) that seeks to extend the norms and rights that sustain viable life to the previously disenfranchised Others of the age of colonialism and imperialism and today's *World Risk Society* (Beck, 1999).

As a first step towards this aim, the Research Centre seeks to investigate the transformation from a European perspective. On the one hand, it will retrace the transformations of background assumptions and of basic institutions of simple modernity in the light of empirical case studies. On the other hand, it will seek to identify those concepts, indicators and institutions that can be regarded as the trailblazers of an emerging second modernity.

The Discontinuity at the Heart of Modernity: The Hypothesis of an Historical Break

When we contrast first and second modern society like this, it naturally leads to the question of continuity and discontinuity. On the basis of what has been said so far, it should be clear that the distinction between the two cannot be that second modern society is full of breaks and crises and first modern society is not. Radical change and crisis are a normal part of all modernization. Both the political order and the dynamics of 'creative destruction' mean that conflict and the institutional consequences of resolving it are an inherent part of modern society. After each round of creative destruction, after every political landslide, there are winners and losers who press their claims. On top of that, there are the claims of individuals to run their own lives versus the claims of institutionalized authority; the claims of innumerable special interests in conflict against each other; and, finally, the autonomous values of social subsystems against which all of the above must be judged. There is no pre-established harmony in modern society, among all the claims that the economic and political systems imbue with legitimacy.

Our central thesis is that side-effects of modern Western society eventually put its touchstone ideas into question. Both its attitude towards problem-solving and its institutionalized answers seem progressively less suited to meet the challenges at hand. The more the foundations are undercut, the more thinkers and social actors feel themselves at sea, the more the Western project of modernization loses its telos. And all of this serves to weaken the claim that only the West can validly interpret the vicissitudes of modernity. Second modern society begins with an argument over the meaning and worth of modernization, as part of a larger struggle to redefine entangled modernities.

The meta-change of first modern society involves everything that

defines it: its coordinates, its correlations, its categories and even its ideas of change. Insofar as this meta-change takes place within modern society, it presents a question of continuity. But what does 'modernity' mean in a world where the modern promises of affluence and self-determination have been replaced for whole swathes of countries with the reality of exclusion? Or, in a world in which the premises of Western modernity seem to be everywhere dissolving? How, under such conditions, can we maintain that this historical break is still contained within the organizing principles of modernity that were developed in the 17th and 18th centuries? Our answer is as follows: the meta-change of the modern could only take place on the basis of its own peculiar normative and cognitive infrastructure, which includes:

- the advent of the socio-historical;
- the idea of the political mouldability of society (however differently this has been interpreted); and
- the principle that all decisions can and must be justified.

It is not possible to get around this horizon of claims, although it may be enlarged upon or disputed in its details.⁵ This is why present-day upheavals should not be interpreted as a farewell to modern society so much as a result of its radicalization, and a shedding of its Western fundamentalism.

The Beginning of Society and the Beginning of History

The founding dualism of sociology is the distinction between traditional and modern society. It has been formulated in numerous ways: as mechanical vs organic solidarity (Durkheim); as status vs contract (Maine); as *Gesellschaft* vs *Gemeinschaft* (Toennies); and as military vs industrial society (Spencer). All of these oppositions have in common that they presume an evolution over time. They are all *evolutionary* dualisms. By contrast, the distinction between first and second modern society is conceived of as an *historical discontinuity*.

Perhaps the transition from pre-modern to modern society should be reconceived in a similar way: as a transition (with many permutations) between different sets of basic ontological categories, and centrally those of time and space. This position would entail that, then as now, along with social change, the conceptual framework in which social order and dynamics were represented changed. Discontinuity conceived of in this way, as *ontological* change, is especially visible in the way society *projects* itself. Reinhard Koselleck elaborates on this point when he says that the transition to modernity involved the change from the dominance of the past to the dominance of the future (Koselleck, 1998). This change, like those now visible on the second modern horizon, disclosed what David Harvey has called new 'spaces of hope' (Harvey, 2000).

The concept of modernity includes many things, but one essential and inextricable component is the *creation of historical society* – that is, the

creation of a society which places itself in continuous history instead of opposing itself to a mythical or distant past. This began with the French Revolution, experienced at the time like a bolt of lightning. The crumbling of the Eastern bloc 200 years later gave off a similar glow, and the present is once again filled with talk of revolution: the information revolution, the genetic revolution, the nanotechnological revolution and, last but not least, the revolution of the global terrorist threat. So, from its beginning, modernity is about the end of the end of history. The great political fights are *never* over. So in world risk society, confronted with a universal terrorist threat, suddenly government matters again. This may also be the end of the triumph of economics and neoliberalism. That is not to say that the economy will not remain central to second modern societies. But the idea that politics has to be substituted by markets and that government does not matter seems almost absurd in the light of a global terrorist threat. The state is back, and for the oldest Hobbesian reason – the provision of security in world risk society.

This *institutionalized openness of social history* does not refer simply to the permanence of change, or innovation, or crisis. It refers to how a discrete set of Western institutions – capitalism, industrialism, urbanism, democracy, human rights – was articulated to a particular cultural *imaginaire* in which progress and rationality play central roles. This articulation is made possible by a particular relation to space and time, dominated by the future rather than by the past. In it, the future becomes the unforeseeable, the accidental, that which cannot be planned for, that which cannot be controlled. The future becomes what Koselleck calls an *expected otherness*.

The concept of ‘modernity’ thus combines an historical break with the creation of history. Conceived thus, break and continuity, stability and change are both inseparable sides of the same modern coin. Both have ineradicably modern meanings. The concept of ‘discontinuity’ makes this paradox clear by grasping the ontological change of social organization and cultural imagination as a change in the system of reference. In this manner it does not deny or ignore the observable continuity of various social features, like religion and pre-market class structures, that endure into modern society. But it emphasizes that they are repositioned in a new ontology of time and space (Adam, 1995, 2000; Tomlinson, 1999).

If one takes this line of thought seriously, then a central theme of modern sociology, the reproduction of social structures, stands revealed as a fantasy, a wish fulfilment taken for reality. It is a utopia that has only been able to maintain its plausibility by means of continual ad hoc justifications in the face of the future’s constantly expected otherness. Understood like this, the origins of the current epochal break lie not in the relation between first and second modern society, but in the heart of modern society itself. And then the question becomes: how has it been possible for first modern society to institutionally suppress the inherently historical quality of society for so long? Historicity was institutionalized in first modern society along

with the spread of the market, the mobility of capital and the innovative power of science and technology. But somehow, at the same time, the reality of continuous change became eternalized into the idea of an autonomous, self-reproducing society, into the structures and categories of the nation-state.

This paradox stands at the forefront of the modern and its understanding of history. On the one hand, as Koselleck (1998) has argued, the concept of modern history contains the consciousness of the constantly renewed uniqueness of the new situation. From the vanishing point of the future comes something that has not been either theologically or teleologically determined, and which is somehow both radical and expected at the same time. The creation of modern society was synonymous with the modern revolution.

In addition, when the grandiose concept of 'world history' became a topic of lively discussion in the 18th and 19th centuries, it meant both secular history and the history of mankind as a whole. But at the very moment when world history became conceivable, it was broken up and walled off into a history of nations and a history of states. The horror at the unbounded openness of the modern world was answered almost immediately by the closedness of the nation-state, both as an idea and as an institutional reality. The political subject of 'modern history' became and still is the nation-state. Modern history is so closely identified with the history of nations and states that it is rarely made explicit any more. 'History' is simply assumed to be national history unless otherwise noted, and society is assumed to mean national society (for critique see Levy and Sznajder, 2001). The Christian idea of history as leading (or not leading) to salvation was replaced – after a very brief detour into world history – by the story of the rise and fall of nation-states. And suddenly the beginning and end of modern society was identified with the past and future of the nation-state, as if there was nothing modern before it and nothing modern that could come after.⁶

But this understanding of history is wrong. The idea that the nation-state defines both the shape of history and the shape of the future is wrong. And our hypothesis is that in second modern society the discrepancy between the national past and the global future will only grow.⁷ That which is expected is becoming more and more different from that which has been experienced, and this excites both hope and anxiety. Of course, the expectation of historical consistency – that the elements of the past that remain in the present will continue to have a similar effect in the future – has never been a guarantee against the future turning out quite differently. That is what the irreducible 'otherness' of the future is all about.

To give the latest example, the question has been asked: 'What could unite the world?' And the hypothetical answer sometimes given is: 'An attack from Mars.' In a sense, the terrorist attack on the Pentagon and the Twin Towers of New York on 11 September was an attack from our inner Mars. And it worked as predicted. Although in historical terms this has only been the blink of eye so far, the warring camps and nations of the world

have united against the common foe of global terrorism. It is precisely the universalism of this terrorist threat, and the universal scope of the struggle against it, that has forged alliances between opposing camps, dampened regional conflicts, and made it both possible and necessary to redraw the political map of the world.

The only consistent way to tackle this expected otherness of second modern societies, both theoretically and existentially, is by means of a thorough-going historical perspectivism. All sociological concepts must be understood as carrying with them an historical perspective that interprets events against the background of the past, the present or the future. And a single present has different meanings, depending on whether it is interpreted as the result of the past or an opening onto the future. As Koselleck emphasizes, experience and expectation are radically different modes of being. Neither can be deduced from or translated into the other. On the contrary, conceiving of the future as an expected otherness leads to a de-realization of the present. The constancy and consistency of the present are revealed by this framework to be a *construct*, as a fiction with real effects. And the view of society as something that can be conceived of as existing solely in the present, from which the past and future can be bracketed off, is shown to be false, because even the supposedly univocal 'present' always means at least two things: the present of the past, and the present of the future.

Whoever assumes that the nation-state paradigm of modern society reproduces itself through a flow of continuous self-renewal is presuming a particular hierarchy of history, namely the dominance of the past and the present over the future. This picture of time dovetails with the picture of space that dominates first modern society. In the same way that society is presumed to be contained in a determinate space, so it is assumed to rise and fall in its own independent time zone, in an extended present projected into both future and past. National societies, territorial societies and societies of the present are all different aspects of the same phenomenon. The idea of the autonomous reproduction of first modern society rests on a *mystification of time*, on the idea of a self-reproducing present. And the historical metaphysics of the society of the present rests on the three identities of the nation state:

1. the homology of space and time;
2. the identity of space and people; and
3. the equivalence of past and future.

All of these identities are called into question by the dynamics of second modern society. And when the expected otherness of the future is fully integrated into our thinking, perhaps these hierarchies of space and time can be overturned.

Of course, one must realistically take into account the resistance to this overthrowing of the categories of time. For one thing, the idea of a

temporally extended present is a *methodological advantage*, not least in the social sciences. Surveys and poll data not only depend on this assumption, but embody it into a professional interest group. Against this perspective, the theory of second modern society aims to found a new *social science of the transnational*: a *cosmopolitan* sociology, a *cosmopolitan* political science and so on, each with a new set of concepts, a new set of theories and a new methodology (Beck, 2000a, 2001a). The reason this change is necessary is that today the future is less and less deducible from the past. When even armed borders can be breached by electronic communications, and new streams of migration are possible, the nation-state can no longer be treated as the unmoved mover. When even national catastrophes like the Holocaust can be moulded in this new environment into global standards (Levy and Sznajder, 2001), it is clear that the future is opening on transnational possibilities that the past never held. And it requires a social science appropriate to the task.

Forms of Meta-change

As stated above, the theory of reflexive modernization maintains that we are now experiencing a meta-change in the formation of Western industrial welfare states, a formation that had been stable for a long time. A meta-change means that the experiential and theoretical coordinates are changing at the same time as the basic institutions. Other theories that have examined the same phenomena have also put forth the notion that the present represents a structural break with the past. Most of the others, however, trace this break back to developments in autonomous subsectors of society, for example to developments in the sphere of information technology (as with the theories of post-industrial society, information society and network society) or to the loss of key certainties in the cultural sphere (as in the theory of postmodern society).

In contrast to such narrow or even monocausal theories, the model of reflexive modernization tries to take into account the whole breadth of the modernization process. The structural break is explained not as a result of exogenous factors but as a consequence of modernization itself. Once modernization has been radicalized, it affects *all* spheres of society. It has a pervasive effect on the historical formations of the post-war modern world. They have become by this time traditions in their own right, and, like previous traditions, they are in need of justification and amenable to rationalization.

Meta-change has many aspects which need to be grasped in their interrelation. But because this model of change is so complex, it is best to start by separating them analytically. The more we can clarify these distinctions, the more focused our empirical research can be. With that in mind, we propose to initially restrict our considerations to only those developments that can be traced back to the following types of meta-change.

Meta-change Resulting from the Unintended Consequences of Simple Modernization

Change by means of side-effects is one of the classical mechanisms of sociological theory (see, e.g., the work of Norbert Elias, or rational choice theory). But the term usually refers to how the unintended consequences of individual action combine to create a collective framework, which in turn sets the initial conditions for individual action. In the context of reflexive modernization, the term 'side-effects' refers less to this sort of action and more to the transformation of social structures and the categories of social thought. The focus is more on what might be called *second-order* side-effects, where the side-effects of *social institutions* result in new conditions that call them into question. Central among these side-effects of side-effects has been the *politicization* of side-effects, which has been a central problem for modern society since the 1960s. A good example is the manner in which the catastrophic risks of new technologies have caused institutional turbulence. The turbulence, in turn, has brought forth a global environmental politics that constitutes a new agent and process of transformation.

This theorem of institutional side-effects has broad acceptance in the current sociological literature, but it can be interpreted in very different ways. One interpretation (Beck, 1995) starts from the 'power of danger to produce institutional opposition'. A subset of this is the idea that institutions built on such second-order dangers – such as European private insurance schemes – grow up exactly where previous means no longer serve, *and* where the system is having difficulty taking decisive action. Under this conception, side-effects disrupt the normal course of institutional decision-making, undercut its rationales and lead by such means in the direction of restructuring. They work, so to speak, like sand in the gears. But this also means that, by (institutional) definition, when they first appear they are ambiguous and incalculable. And it is this that breeds new forms of politicization. This is how the public perception of the BSE crisis led to the fastest passage of laws in the history of the German Republic. Overnight, the production and provision of meat and bone meal were made illegal without the 'iron rule' of legislation – that the cost of laws must be weighed before making them – ever even being mentioned. It was as sudden as the coming down of the Berlin Wall, which for decades everyone knew was impossible, until crowds knocked it over like a house of cards.

A second line of thought places greater emphasis on the fact that risks are mental constructs. On this view, conflicts between the definitions of risk put forth by scientific experts and those of political actors lead to institutional legitimation deficits. Scientific reasoning can no longer solve such situations the way it once did, because technical standards of safety are now confronted by the conviction that some things are in principle uncertain. The politicization of side-effects is then driven forward by the opposed interests of decision-makers, profit-makers and affected populations, relatively independently from the actual risk at hand. Under this interpretation of the

theorem of side-effects, turbulence is caused by public discourse, that is, by the political arguments of collective actors that include consumers, the mass media and new social movements. Meta-change, on this view, has thus arisen through a public reflection on the technical promises of security that defined first modern society. In the course of this process, a change in social priorities and expectations has taken place. Risks and expectations of catastrophe now dominate public debate *before* decisions are made.

These two interpretations do not contradict one another. Instead they serve to elaborate the many-sidedness of the phenomenon. Both are concerned with how side-effects can cause institutional crises, but the first concentrates on how they can cause *functional* crises, and the second with how the dynamics of interest group politics can cause crises of *legitimation*. The consequences are also different. Functional crises demand substantial institutional innovation, while legitimation crises may possibly be straightened out by changing decision-making procedures, and by balancing out opposing interests.

Radicalized Modernization

The principles of modern society were not until very recently applied to every sphere of social life. What happened instead in the beginning was that countermodern social structures were generated in reaction, and combined with specifically modern ones to fill out the full form of first modern society. Parallel to the processes of marketization, rationalization and the increase of productivity was the re-invention of tradition and community structures. First modern society was set in a kind of countermodern base that damped the dynamics of modernization. The nuclear family, the non-market roles of woman, ascriptive modes of class assignment, and the nation-state all performed social integration functions in first modern society. All were originally beyond any need for justification. And all were eventually called into question by the process of reflexive modernization. Under the influence of an increasingly radicalized and all-encompassing modernization (which includes phenomena as different as globalization, the freeing of markets and the prospect of manipulable human genes), each of these institutions has lost its taken-for-granted character. They have become experienced as variable, mouldable, and as the product of free choice. And that has brought them under continual pressure to justify their current form.

On the one hand, the multiplication of possible forms of community, and the dissolution of mechanisms that placed boundaries on people's choices and assigned them social roles against their will, are continuations of the central and most valued process of modernization – and one which is cherished by countermodernists as well: the emancipation of the individual. On the other hand, the loss of neo-traditional forms of community causes uncertainties in the socialization process, which in turn cause deficits in social integration. Against these deficits are counterposed a large number of attempts to build new secondary forms of community, ranging

from youth culture to fundamentalist ethnic groups. Reflexive modernity can be seen as a vast field of social experiment where, under the pressure of globalization, various types of post-traditional social bonds and post-national imagined communities are being tried out in competition with each other (Keupp et al., 2001). Whether this process will produce reflexive solutions, that is, community structures that can stabilize themselves without depending on an appeal to naturalness for their legitimacy, is still an empirically open question.

Questioning the Cognitive Basis of First Modern Society

Rationalization, the process of increasing the rationality of action and thought, accomplishes much of its task through the application of unquestioned criteria and assumptions. It is these which determine what, in any given case, in any already differentiated sphere of action or research, will count as rational. A key component of reflexive modernization is that this unquestioned basis of modernization is itself examined in terms of its rationality. This is part of why we characterize it as second-order rationalization or reflexivity. In the course of this reflection on reflection, the assumptions that guaranteed the rationality of various subsystems lose their obviousness and persuasiveness. It becomes ever more abundantly clear that every given is in fact a choice, and that at the level of fundamental propositions, such ultimate starting points can only be normatively grounded, or defended as useful a priori constructs. When applied rigorously, the modern principles of rational justification simply do not work all the way down to the ground.

To the extent that this erosion of the bases of certainty is publicly recognized, space is opened up for alternative forms of knowledge to come into play. In retrospect, these might always have been at work latently justifying actions and decisions. But they could not previously be used as public justifications. They were considered illegitimate as long as they could not be squared with the dominant model of rationality.⁸ The result of this sort of second-order rationalization is a situation in which there is no longer 'one best way' to solve every problem, but rather several equally valid modes of justification that operate simultaneously. Such a loosening up of the foundations of rationality could lead to a multitude of alternative optimization strategies and/or to an expansion in scientific and technical knowledge.

In science, this process of putting foundations into question was mostly carried out by an external subfield that specialized in reflection on science, namely the philosophy and sociology of science. This reflection on scientific reflection has demonstrated that the choice between alternate methods of solution does not flow of itself from scientific method. Instead it is generally derived from a variety of extra-scientific criteria, including public recognition, personal experience, aesthetic judgment and the procedures that allocate money and resources. But in other fields, the same sort of meta-reflection is often undertaken internally, by the actors themselves. So, for example, the overcoming of a technical and one-sided functionalism was overthrown in architecture by architects themselves. A similar

pluralization of perspectives has been described in all cultural fields by the theory of post-modernism. But reflection on fundamental principles can also be seen in practical fields as diverse as organizational theory, technical engineering and legal thought.

The classical paradigm of first modern society is that intellectual progress along a diversity of fronts will in the end yield a unified picture of the world, and furthermore one that evidences the universality of common principles. This model now stands refuted. This is the lesson that can be drawn tangentially from such disparate phenomena as the greenhouse effect, mad cow disease and the potential risks of globalized financial markets. Each sets off heated arguments among experts that typically can't be resolved by gathering additional information, but instead deepen, widen and multiply themselves. New objects of investigation and new lines of research more often than not turn up new risks and side-effects, and in the process undermine not only the claims of rationality but also those of control. Rather than focusing on and resolving the crises, the established processes of 'crisis resolution' set off new chain reactions – loss of confidence, the collapse of markets, the struggle over assigning blame and the virtual abolition of borders – that further jam those mechanisms and set off even more turbulence, which has by this point become predictably unpredictable.

In contradistinction to many postmodern positions, the perspective of reflexive modernization does not posit an arbitrary multiplicity as an ultimate fact. Such a situation can only maintain itself over the long run in cultural spheres that are free from the burden of decision-making. In general, where decisions must be made, where legitimacy is demanded and where responsibility must be assigned, procedures must be worked out and criteria must be agreed upon at least to the degree that better solutions can be distinguished from worse. Such reflexive practical knowledge is constantly revisable. It arises from a diversity of sources and has foregone any pre-existing claims to certainty. But it offers a context-determined and temporally limited orientation for action that makes learning through experience possible.

Dissolving Fundamental Distinctions

This topic relates mainly to the cognitive aspects of the side-effect theorem. Certain scientific and technical developments can – according to the hypothesis – create a situation in which some of the fundamental distinctions of modern society no longer hold true. But this can happen not only through the second-order process of reflection described above, but also through side-effects of technical innovation that blur reality. This is especially clear in the case of the boundary between nature and society (Lau and Bösch, 2001). This division came into being in a specific form with modern society and was for a long time a constitutive part of its institutional order. So long as it was clear that there was a sphere of reality that was 'natural', and which could be distinguished from everything social and cultural, it limited the extent to which certain social arrangements had to

answer for themselves. Anything considered natural was relieved from the need to justify itself. It was self-legitimizing. But this ontological division can no longer maintain itself in the light of new technological developments. All institutions and systems of action that functionally base themselves on 'natural' definitions like that between life and death, between health and sickness, or between risk and danger have been brought into difficulty by the growth of what Bruno Latour has called 'hybrids' (Latour, 2001). One reason it is unlikely there will ever be a complete overthrow of the distinction between nature and society (as has been postulated and celebrated by some representatives of postmodernism) is precisely because it would destroy the ability of such institutions to function. The theory of reflexive modernization starts from the more realistic assumption that there will be a pluralization of natural definitions, and thus of the fictional pictures of nature that each implies.

It remains to be investigated whether other fundamental distinctions are affected by forms of meta-change that are independent of the process of double reflection described above. One key question that remains to be taken up is whether the distinction between gainful employment and other forms of activity is beginning to blur in favour of an extension and pluralization of what counts as work. Given the key role that gainful employment plays in modern society, this would have widespread ramifications. Another important boundary that awaits investigation is that between public and private, which appears to be blurring under the influence of new means of communication and to be losing its ability to orient people. A similar melting of the distinction between global and local (expressed in the literature by the term 'glocal') has also been the subject of several empirical and theoretical investigations. Other candidates for fundamental distinctions of independent importance that are beginning to blur are the distinctions between market and hierarchy (Döhl et al., 2001), fiction and reality, the distinction between any given sociological We and the Others that are its structuring absence (Beck-Gernsheim, 1999), life and death, and, last but not least, war and peace (Beck, 2001b; Kaldor, 1999).

To illustrate this again in relation to the world after 11 September 2001: today, instead of an either-or, we face a this-as-well-as-that world: national security is no longer national security; foreign and domestic policy, national security and international cooperation are now interlocked. Not only have the walls between inside and outside, military and police, secret service and police been torn down, but also the walls between innocent and guilty persons, those under suspicion and those not under suspicion, where previously the law had made a very strict and clear distinction. Under conditions of a universalized perception of terrorist threats *all* individuals and individual rights are transformed into a risk to the state.

What is interesting about this implosion (or rather pluralization) of the central dichotomies that define first modern society is that it is *not* synonymous with any kind de-differentiation in the original sense of the term. That is to say, it does not signify a reversal of functional differentiation. What is

happening instead is that dualisms that are inscribed deep in our institutions and habits of thinking, and which have not been examined systematically in sociological theory hitherto, are losing their univocality.

The forms of meta-change (or reflexive modernization) that have been sketched out in this section are clearly ideal types. In reality they can occur simultaneously or in variable sequences. For example, the reflection on fundamental principles and dichotomies might precede the problematization of side-effects and serve to strengthen it, or the reverse might happen. The research programme of reflexive modernization is an endeavour to disentangle these complex and intertwined causal relations. The purpose of systematically distilling out ideal types of reflexive modernization as in the foregoing section is to bring clarity to our concrete comparisons, as well as to draw a line between reflexive and nonreflexive forms of social change. (Demographic changes are a good example of the latter.)

Test Criteria for the Presence of Reflexive Modernization⁹

As a means of summing up the argument so far, as well as preparing the theory of reflexive modernization for operationalization and testing, it is time to formulate some analytic test criteria. These will first be expounded in general terms, and then applied to the example of subjectivity in order to bring out some implications and make them more concrete.

General Criteria

The Multiplicity of Boundaries (or of Attempts to Draw Boundaries). An operational definition of reflexive modernization is that the boundaries between social spheres are multiplied. This is also true for the boundaries between society and nature, between knowledge and superstition, between life and death and between Us and the Others. Each of these boundaries *becomes pluralized*. And this entails three things:

1. Boundaries cease to be given and instead become choices. Drawing boundaries becomes optional.
2. Simultaneous with that, there is a multiplication of the plausible ways in which boundaries can be drawn, as well as the ways in which they can be brought into doubt; and
3. The existence of multiple boundaries changes not only the collectivity defined by them but the nature of boundaries themselves. They become not boundaries so much as a variety of attempts to draw boundaries. In a similar manner, border conflicts are transformed into conflicts over the drawing of borders.

To sum that all up in another way: the more boundaries increase, the easier it becomes to draw new ones.

The Pressure to Draw Contextually Determined Boundaries. While

postmodernism celebrates this multiplication and opening up of boundaries, reflexive modernization posits that every individual and institutional decision presupposes that boundaries have somehow been drawn on a practical basis. Things have been included or excluded and a line drawn between them. In reflexive modern society, however, there is not a limited array of already available options. Instead, the boundaries have to be created along with the decisions. The more various and divergent the recognized and accepted justifications for inclusion or exclusion are, the more they take on an 'as-if' character – the more they become fictive boundaries that are understood as such but which are handled as if they were true under the circumstances at hand. This can serve as a litmus test for the existence of reflexive modernity as opposed to postmodernity: the existence of boundaries whose artificial character is freely recognized, but which are recognized as legitimate boundaries all the same. In other words, reflexive modernity exists to the extent that fictive as-if boundaries are institutionalized into systematic procedures that affect everyday life.

The prerequisite for this transformation is the turbulence occasioned in institutions by the loss of pre-given boundaries and means of drawing them. This turbulence can be met in at least two ways. Either an attempt can be made to restore the authority of the old boundaries, or the interaction with uncertainty and insecurity can be incorporated into an institutional learning process.

Beyond Certainty: The Multiplying of Rationalities. Another reason that boundaries become harder to maintain is that the multiplication of valid means of justification leads to a multiplication of claims to knowledge. The boundaries of knowledge – that is, the boundaries between scientific and unscientific, between science and politics, and between experts and laymen – have now been drawn in several places at the same time. So the conclusion of a dispute over what counts as knowledge can no longer have the same finality. The most striking consequence is that the established sciences no longer have the definitive power to end disputes. In the first place, scientists themselves have publicized their own disputes about fundamental principles. And, in the second place, even when there is consensus in a field, scientists from other fields can jump in and contradict the resultant conclusions once they enter the public arena. And then on top of all this is the fact that perspectives once considered illegitimate have won recognition and importance.

This could be understood as a postmodern situation. What would make it a reflexive modern situation, by contrast, is when the conclusion of such a debate is reached *explicitly*, but without recourse to the authority of scientific knowledge. The practical motto is as follows: 'Even when we don't know what we have to know, we still have to decide – or at the very least to decide that we won't decide now, and to decide on a date when we will.' A good example of this motto in action is the precautionary rule: under conditions of uncertainty and doubt, decide for the doubt. Rules like this can't be

justified on purely scientific grounds. Instead they open up the process of making rules and determining limits to many standards of rational action and agents of advocacy. The debate begins based on the recognition that science offers a multitude of options; that there are controversies among scientists as well as within the public; and that the problem is how to resolve all these differences democratically. In this new situation, the foremost public task of science is no longer to silence controversies, but rather to enable them, that is, to enable different public voices to be heard and to make themselves count. Or, in other words, to enable democracy (Latour, 2001).

Expecting the Unexpected. The main result of this shift is that the decision-making process becomes dominated by the expectation of unexpected side-effects. When this goes so far as to reverse the sequence of decision-making – when the expectation of unexpected consequences precedes the decision itself – then, in the language of economics, externalities have been internalized. What was once cordoned off from the decision-making process as below the level of significance has now become integral to that process. It has also become integrated into the objects of thought. Side-effects become in practice inseparable from the meaning of initial facts. The result is that the more we know, the more our facts, decisions and objects become dominated by the unexpected consequences that are now an integral part of them. And this means that a growth in objectivity no longer produces a growth in consensus. Rather it entails the opposite: more objectivity produces more dissent. In order to resolve the chronic disputes that result from this reality, ad hoc decision-making institutions emerge of necessity in subpolitical arenas. In such a situation, there can be no generally universalizable solutions. For ad hoc problems, only ad hoc solutions are suitable.

The Consequences for Subjectivity: The Birth of the Quasi-subject

The arguments sketched above apply to a very diverse set of boundaries that are constitutive for both theory and experience, including the boundaries between nation-states, the national and the international, society and nature, between economy and state, etc. In order to clarify these arguments let us examine how they apply to subjectivity (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2001).

Scott Lash (2001: ix–x) writes:

The individual of the first modernity is reflective while that of the second modernity is reflexive. The idea of reflective belongs to the philosophy of consciousness of the first modernity. And, to be fair, Habermas was one of the first to note this. To reflect is to somehow subsume the object under the subject of knowledge. Reflection presumes apodictic knowledge and certainty. It presumes a dualism, a scientific attitude in which the subject is in one realm, the object of knowledge in another. Beck's work from the very

Table 1 General Criteria

	Simple, or first modern society	Reflexive, or second modern society	Postmodern society
<i>The nature of boundaries</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Unambiguous, institutionally guaranteed boundaries (between social spheres, between nature and society, between scientific and unscientific) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A multiplicity of boundaries and fundamental distinctions ■ Recognition of this multiplicity ■ The necessity of institutionalizing self-consciously fictive boundaries ■ New problems of institutionalized decision-making (conflicts of responsibility and boundary conflicts) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A multiplicity tending toward the dissolution of boundaries ■ Recognition of this multiplicity
<i>The function, nature and position of science in society</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ending debate through the discourse of scientific consensus ■ The minimization of side-effects and ineradicable residual uncertainty ■ The monopoly of legitimate knowledge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Growth of contradictory scientific camps ■ Recognition of extra-scientific justifications ■ Increased account taken of unexpected side-effects ■ Debate ended through ad hoc institutional means of reaching a decision 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A lessened need for justification and the recognition of arbitrary multiplicity

start has presupposed a critique of such objectivist knowledge, a critique of such dualisms, be they Cartesian or Kantian. Thus the objectivity of simple-modernity individualism is replaced by the *intentionality* of knowledge in the second modernity. This intentionality is again at centre stage in *Risk Society*,

now tied up with the ecological *problématique*. Science and industry for all their claims to objectivity, and to being somehow objective and outside of the world, are indeed in the world with their own proper interest-constituted intentionality. The problem here, although it is at the same time its saving grace, is that what is intended leads to the most extraordinary unintendedness, to side-effects, to unintended consequences.

The Cartesian subject of simple modernity, of Descartes' *Metaphysical Meditations* is reflective. So is the Kantian subject of determinate judgement. Beck often describes today's non-linear individual in terms of, not the 'I think therefore I am', but instead in terms of 'I am I'. 'I think, therefore I am' has to do with reflection. 'I am I' has more to do with reflex. And Beck often indeed works from the contrast of 'reflex' with 'reflection'. Reflexive he argues has more to do with reflex than reflection. Reflexes are indeterminate. They are immediate. They do not in any sense subsume. Reflexes cope with a world of speed and quick decision-making. The contemporary individual, Beck never tires of saying, is characterised by choice, where previous generations had no such choices. What Beck often omits to say is that this individual must choose *fast*, must – as in a reflex – make quick decisions. Second-modernity individuals haven't sufficient reflective distance on themselves to construct linear and narrative biographies. They must be content, as Ronald Hitzler has noted with *Bastelbiographien*, with bricolage-biographies in Lévi-Strauss's sense. The non-linear individual may wish to be reflective but has neither the time nor the space to reflect. He is a *combinard*. He puts together networks, constructs alliances, makes deals. He must live, is forced to live in an atmosphere of risk in which knowledge and life-chances are precarious. So what is at stake here? The second modernity and its non-linear individualism is a result of the retreat of the classic institutions: state, class, nuclear family, ethnic group. The roles that reproduced linear individuals and systems in the first modernity are transgressed. Yet the result is not the disappearance of the subject, or a general irrationality. The subject relating to today's fragmented institutions instead has moved from a position of reflection to one of being reflexive. Yet this subject is so constantly in motion that it makes little sense to talk about a subject-*position*. The subject is still with us and so is knowledge. Only knowledge itself is *of* uncertainty. What happens now is not non-knowledge or anti-reason. Indeed the reflexive-modern individual is better educated, more knowledgeable than ever. Instead the type of knowledge at stake changes. It is itself precarious as distinct from certain, and what that knowledge is about is also uncertain – probabilistic, at best; more likely 'possibilistic'.

So what does the distinction between a first modern and a second modern subjectivity refer to?

Limited Sovereignty and Calculable Subjectivity. In first modern society, the subject was conceived of in terms of limited sovereignty and calculable subjectivity. The fundamental assumption was that certain boundaries were independently assigned and beyond an individual's control. Such non-optional boundaries were thought to provide the only framework that made

stable identity and individuality possible. These unalterable, taken-for-granted boundaries were all based on various essentialist pictures of the world. Some of these world pictures based themselves on biology, like sexual differences, or differences in skin colour, or disparities inherent in human nature. Some were based on society and culture, like class differentials and differences in family structure. Some were even based on differences in technological development, like the differences between industrial and agricultural ways of life, or between degrees of involvement in transnational networks.

Under this scheme, individuals are supposed to create their lives by building upon pre-given patterns of occupation, family, gender, neighbourhood and nation. Subjectivity develops within the boundaries assigned by the life situation accompanying a given social position. Transgressions of these boundaries do not call them into question but rather confirm them through being regarded as deviances or exceptions. The inclusion of the individual in diverse social, institutional and cultural networks does not as a rule lead to contradictions, but rather to a single, well-defined, unambiguous social identity.

A Multiplicity of Subject Boundaries. In reflexive modern society, such pre-given boundaries are undermined and overthrown through the technological, economic, political and cultural processes of radicalized modernization. The end result is that the subject no longer has firm boundaries. There is instead a multiplicity of inclusionary and exclusionary practices, and, according to context, a multiplicity of ways that things are bounded off. The question 'What groups do I belong to?' can no longer be answered collectively according to pre-given social patterns, but must instead be answered individually with reference to changed probabilities and new stereotypes.

Characterized thus, the situation fits the usual description of 'post-modern'. What would make it distinctively 'reflexive modern' would be if:

1. the multiplicity of subject boundaries were *recognized* and this recognition led to institutional turbulence (e.g. in the adjudication of citizenship rights or in the compiling of official statistics);
2. the necessity of constructing fictional but consequential subject boundaries were accepted; and
3. a distinction were to emerge between a *de jure* subject and a *de facto* one. That is to say, the idea of an acting and deciding subject were preserved as a legal fiction because decision-making would otherwise be impossible, but at the same time the impossibility and unreality of the 'sovereign subject' would be acknowledged as the underlying reality.

The Agents of Individualization Are Also Its Victims. Reflexive individualization is no longer, so to speak, 'autistic'. Instead it is conceived in terms of networks and interaction. And it produces side-effects on many levels, because what for one individual is the overstepping or overthrowing

of boundaries is for another the setting of new boundaries and the changing of the probabilities of various outcomes. Individualization thus not only multiplies side-effects, it deepens *asymmetries*. A new distribution of possibilities is simultaneously a new distribution of impossibilities for someone else. This is what it means to say that the agents of individualization are also its victims. How the growth and loss of freedoms are distributed, and what sorts of patterns are formed by the resultant asymmetries, is a subject for empirical research. But it can only be researched on the basis of a new conceptualization. The guiding assumption must be that the reflexive modern subject *creates* her network (and maintains it), where the simple modern subject *interprets* her network (through pre-given boundaries).

The multiplicity of subject boundaries can also be understood as the dissolution or displacement of the boundaries of *individual responsibility*. If it is no longer clear what group a person belongs to or where they reside, conflicts over responsibility are inevitable. Procedures that attempt to solve these problems have to grapple with conflicting rules, procedures and background information. The fact that the lines of responsibility are blurred and the subject unclearly defined means such procedures are of necessity complex. The attempt to reconcile such contradictory spheres of responsibility can lead to ethical dilemmas and a collective undecidability in which cases are decided at best arbitrarily. This is exactly the sort of situation in which the first modern ideal of a universal rationality that can successfully orient itself on the basis of clear principles proves itself to be an illusion.

The Quasi-subject. Against this new background, the individual can no longer be conceived of as a stable and unchangeable subject, but rather as a 'quasi-subject', the result *as well as* the producer of its networks, situation, location and form. The subject can no longer be conceived of as master of its surroundings within prescribed boundaries. Its rational action no longer constitutes nor guarantees a secure social order. But, paradoxically, the individual remains, and may become more than ever, a fictive decision-maker, the author of his self and his biography. The more careers become unpredictable, the more importance is given to the fictive narratives that imbue them with meaning, and the more such biographies become recognized and expected. They become the biography of the 'self-employed' in every sense of the term.

The Internet is the obvious example of a de-spatialized means of societal inclusion that has been made possible by technological advance. It also provides an excellent example of the double character of sovereignty and dependency that characterizes the reflexive subject. The subject comes with a constellation that simultaneously constitutes it and provides it with a field of play. On one side, the net is produced by individuals. They alone decide when and with whom to make connections, and for how long. Of course at the same time they are the prisoner not only of their own decisions but of the decisions of others (as well as of the technological arrangements, of course). On the other side, subjectivity is now a product of self-selected

networks, which are developed, through self-organization, into spheres that enable self-expression, and reinforce it through public recognition. Both the self and the public develop in tandem.

In this way the tension between role expectations and role distance is replaced by a different dynamic. The subject becomes part of a self-selected network which allows connection and communication, but also makes it the object of the choices and decisions of others. Instead of being the planner and ruler of its own life, guided by pre-given principles, the subject is transformed into a constitutive part of a context that determines its subjectivity, and within which it exercises joint decision-making power. Quasi-subjectivity thus describes a situation of *socially constructed autonomy* that is understood and experienced as such.

The ambivalence and contradictory nature of this situation were well captured by Richard Sennett (1998). He summarized the very different reactions people have to the new situation of flexible employment by positing two different personality types, the 'surfer' and the 'drifter'. 'Surfers' accept as a given that there will be rapid changes of context, and that they need to respond to them actively. They try to be actively conscious of change as a means of steering. Surfing is the model of an activity that accepts that decisions must and can be made under conditions of uncertainty. It also rests on the idea that everything can be straightened out in the long run.

'Drifters', by contrast, experience the contingency and non-continuity of life as a loss and a threat. The multiplicity of subject boundaries appears to them as something that harms their chances of making decisions and steering their lives. The feeling of not-belonging, and the reality of being affected by other individuals' decisions, combine to make drifters into passive and mouldable objects of social restructuring. The fragmentation of life is not greeted as a happy-go-lucky collection of postmodern accidents. Instead it is interpreted against the background of lost powers of making decisions and of assuming responsibility. This feeling of loss leads either to a drive to recover those lost powers, or an aimless turning inward.

Of course, how decisiveness and indecisiveness are actually distributed is an empirical question. But it seems clear that both too much decisiveness and too little can lead to pathologies. The first can lead to an overburdening of the decision-making process, or to an illusion of control where it does not in fact exist. The latter results in apathy. And both can be reinforced from small beginnings through repeated experience.

Periodization as a Heuristic Device

Against this background, it is possible to clarify the distinction between first modern and second modern society. Once again, the goal of this division is *not* to introduce a problematic new evolutionary periodization according to which one era comes abruptly to an end and a new one begins. It is not as if, at one point in time, all the old social relationships disappear and are replaced by brand new ones. The purpose of distinguishing between first and second modern society is methodological and pragmatic. In the first

Table 2 Consequences for Subjectivity

	Simple, or first modern society	Reflexive, or second modern society	Postmodern society
<i>Institutional and subject boundaries</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Clearly assigned and indisputable subject boundaries defining all aspects of social life, including its institutional, cultural and technical aspects ■ Life trajectories steered within the limits set by these subject boundaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Multiplicity of possible subject boundaries ■ Recognition of the multiplicity of subject boundaries ■ A necessity for the subjective drawing of boundaries, and their recognition as positive fictions ■ Institutional, collective and individual difficulties coordinating the multiplicity of networks and subject boundaries ■ Subject as producer as well as result of its boundaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Multiplicity of possible subject boundaries ■ Necessity for the subjective drawing of boundaries not recognized ■ Bricolage mentality; a pluralized, defoundationalizing subjectivity
<i>The foundations of knowledge and rationality</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Unambiguous foundations for drawing institutional, cultural, physical, moral and technical boundaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A multiplying of the acceptable bases on which the subject can be defined ■ A resultant individualization of self-definition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Experimental, aesthetic, or arbitrary and situational displacement of subject boundaries

Continued

Table 2 *Continued*

Simple, or first modern society	Reflexive, or second modern society	Postmodern society
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="571 306 783 448">■ A simultaneous orientation towards several different patterns of identity <li data-bbox="571 483 783 737">■ A recognition of the unexpected consequences of individual and institutional decisions, and an internalization of the resulting uncertainty <li data-bbox="571 772 783 913">■ Cooperative decision making through ad hoc, subpolitical negotiations <li data-bbox="571 949 783 1178">■ Recognition of the fictional nature of the models underlying personal decisions and biographies 	

place, it enables us to pose the question of new categories of thought and a new frame of reference to understand, name and analyse the emerging new rules of the (global power) game in the clearest possible terms. Of course, instead of an either–or between first and second modernity we face in sociological analysis the challenge of a specific this-as-well-as-that-realities: aspects of first and second modernity are interlocked. But in order to understand the complexities, in the second place, it poses the critique of the sociological framework that has been handed down to us in the sharpest possible terms. That framework is pervaded by an unacknowledged insistence on interpreting every social phenomenon within the national gaze, methodological nationalism, the frame of reference of the nation-state. (See Ulrich Beck on ‘zombie sociology’, 2002.) This division suspends that

assumption and follows out its consequences. This approach will bear empirical fruit to the extent that its new concepts can successfully serve as keys to understanding second modern society. That society's horizon of expectations and horizon of experience can only be studied to the extent they can be formulated in words.

Naturally, once you suspend such a central assumption, all sorts of subsidiary questions must necessarily arise spontaneously in the course of research. For example, what do 'class' and 'social inequality' mean under conditions of individualization and globalization? How can we measure how transnational inequalities impinge on individual expectations and experience? Or how far does the perception of global risks transform the concept of rationality in science and law? What is the role of politics in transnational conflicts over global risks – like terrorist networks, but also climate change or BSE – which are determined chiefly by the knowledge that we don't know? How are the concepts of 'employment' and 'work', 'corporation' and 'organization' transformed by globalization and the new economy? And how far has the state already mutated into a super-, supra-, inter-, post-, neo-national or transnational or cosmopolitical state?

Notes

1. This article unfolds the research agenda of the 'Reflexive Modernization' Research Centre in Munich, Germany, which is financed by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG). The 15 research projects examine a broad range of questions with regard to three specific fields: (1) the *political epistemology of uncertainty* – the research projects of this area explore the extent to which techno-scientific rationalization and the growth of knowledge result in more cognitive and normative uncertainty rather than in more certainty and control; (2) they examine how the multiplication of options affects individual biographies, social positions and inequalities – in so doing, the research projects contribute to a *political sociology of ambiguity* that relates the reshaping of individual life-courses to social transformations; (3) they investigate changes in the institutional and organizational realm as a contribution to a *political economy of uncertainty*. Focusing on enterprises, the nation-state, the globality of financial risks and new conflicts, the research projects address the demands and uncertainties facing central institutions of first modernity. We undertake to begin these tasks in our book *Die Modernisierung der Moderne* (Beck and Bonss, 2001).
2. The discourse of 'pluralized modernities' overemphasizes the importance of culture, and underestimates the importance of power structures, capital strategies and global dependencies. On top of that, it starts from the assumption that the world can still be clearly divided into countries and cultural zones, which means that, for all its emphasis on culture, it is still very much trapped in territorial thinking. Shalini Randeria's notion of 'entangled modernities' (1999) avoids these shortcomings.
3. It was Bruno Latour who suggested that the tongue-twisting 'reflexive modernization' might be shortened to 're-modernization'; see Latour, 2003.
4. This question is being extensively discussed in Beck (1999: ch. 6) and Lash (2001).

5. This of course begs the question, without answering it, of whether there can be a transcultural redefinition of modernity based on traditions outside the Western monopoly. But there is a reason for preferring self-critique at this stage. The basic argument of the theory of second modern society is that there is something fundamentally wrong with the modern project, the principles of modernity are open for anti-imperialistic critique, innovation and redefinitions, especially from a non-European perspective and therefore worth preserving. The best way to defend it against both those who would airily proclaim 'the end of modernity' and those who would make modernity into a new kind of Western fundamentalism, is to subject the theory of modernity and modern society to the sort of self-critique that could rescue it from its limitations. The norms that underlie this self-critique cannot themselves be derived from re-signification of modernities. They have to be derived from a cosmopolitical theory of second modernity. One must make substantive decisions about what will be a less violent future in a world risk society, what will be a more inclusive population, what will help to fulfil, in substantive terms, the claims of cosmopolitan justice that we seek to understand in their historical roots, cultural specificity and social meaning.

6. This was not, however, the view of earlier authors, prominent among them Kant and Marx. Both thought of the passage to modern society as the transition from relatively small, autonomous and closed-off communities to a 'universal epoch' (as Goethe put it) of larger and more interdependent societies. Both thought that the extension of commerce and 'political republicanism' were essential parts of this transition. But the tendency of both of them to take the long historical view made it appear implausible to either of them that the nation-state could embody the end of historical development, the *ne plus ultra* of world history, the only form that democracy and political society could ever possibly take.

7. A similar argument was recently made by Charles Maier (2000), one of America's most important historians, who teaches at Harvard. He described the 20th century just past as 'the emergence, ascendancy, and subsequent crisis of territoriality', and appealed to historians to make themselves familiar with the sociological literature on globalization. See also Barbara Adam (2000), who discusses among other things how the institutions of first modern, industrial society have a short time-horizon of decision-making, by means of which long-term problems, both foreseen and unforeseen, are pushed off the screen of consciousness.

8. See Böhle et al. (2001) and Heymann and Wengenroth (2001) for two different perspectives that enlarge on this point.

9. The following test criteria were developed in a joint workshop with Bruno Latour (see Latour, 2003).

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